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SUMMERFEST REVISITED

Arch to triumph?

MARYANNE FIRTH
PelhamNEWS Staff

FONTHILL — Truck traffic continues to be limited at Pelham Town Square as councillors decide the fate of the Summerfest arches.

At the request of Ward 2 Coun. Gary Accursi, town council has extended the bylaw that limits truck traffic in the square. The bylaw was put in place to meet height restrictions imposed by the arches.

The extension will allow council time to review the July festival's postmortem report, which is expected to be presented at the Oct. 15 meeting. Council will then decide whether the arches will become a permanent feature in the town's downtown core.

Accursi requested a one-month extension of the truck restriction, moving the deadline to the end of October. The request was approved unanimously.

If council decides to remove the arches, it will still leave ample time to see them properly disassembled before the truck restriction comes to an end and the winter weather rolls in, Accursi said.

If it's determined the arches are to become a permanent fixture, there will also be time to have them finished and winterized for the coming season, he added.

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MARYANNE FIRTH Staff Photo
Truck traffic continues to be limited at Pelham Town Square as council decides the fate of the Summerfest arches.

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■ HEALTH CARE

Smith responds to critics

ALLAN BENNER
PelhamNEWS Staff

WELLAND — South Niagara's five mayors unanimously recommended two prospective hospital sites.

Now, to have some of those same mayors complaining about the decision to build at one of them — in Niagara Falls — "is a little disheartening to me," said Kevin Smith, Niagara Health System's provincially appointed supervisor.

"We said, 'You tell me where you'd like this hospital to be built.' The response unanimously was, 'Either of these sites will be fine,'" Smith said in an interview to respond to criticism hurled his way in recent weeks.

"Obviously, I'm disappointed to hear people now say, 'What I told you I unanimously support and believe can be helpful in delivering quality of care, I'm now going to take a different path.' That makes it very difficult for planning a logic-based health-care-based model."

Smith said he understands the challenges that elected officials face, "but I also recognize that the price of leadership is occasionally taking the unpopular stance when good data and good reasons are available."

JULIE JOCSAK Standard Staff
Kevin Smith responded to criticism directed at his hospital recommendation.

Physicians have also criticized Smith's final NHS report, pointing out that the financial data he listed includes the cost of urgent care centres in most of his options. But those costs are not included in Smith's preferred option.

Smith said financial data was not an important factor in his recommendation.

"This was not a financial decision at all," he said. "We're not here to be a finance shop. We're here to be a hospital."

He called it "scaremongering" to suggest that other hospital programs would not be able to continue at local hospitals if inpatient maternal child care services are consolidated in St. Catharines. There will, after all, still be some maternal child care services available.

"Obstetricians and gynecologists will be at that site," he said. "They'll be doing day cases there, they'll be doing day surgery there. All of that suggestion in my view is a worse case scenario or a bit of scaremongering."

Smith said the debate about consolidating inpatient maternal child care "is about clinical disagreement."

"It's not really about whether it's a safe model. We know it's a safe model."

He said it was recommended by an expert panel that included people like Mary Jo Haddad, chief executive officer of the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. And that panel, he added, "would not make a recommendation that is not in the best interest of children and moms."

The majority of concerns expressed about his recommendations have come from physicians.

But nurses, Smith added, may bave a different opinion.

"Nurses are there 24/7," he said. "When you're looking after two or three pediatrics patients at any one time and you're putting them often on adult wards, our nursing colleagues have been clear in saying that's not a recipe for the very best care."

Smith said he also understands concerns expressed throughout the community.

"I do understand that letting the organization that you've come to love change is hard," he said.

But change, he added, is needed.

"We don't need anymore analysis in Niagara. We need to move on with implementing a plan."

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THE PANEL

NHS supervisor Kevin Smith's expert panel included:

- Mary Jo Haddad, chief executive officer of the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.
- Lennox Huang, the academic chair of pediatrics at McMaster University.
- Nicholas Leyland, the academic chair of obstetrics at McMaster University.
- Brenda Flaherty, vice-president of clinical operations at Hamilton Health Sciences.

pelhambriefs

HERITAGE PLAN OK'D

PELHAM — After two years of work, Pelham has adopted its heritage master plan.

Town council passed the document, created by Carl Bray of Bray Heritage, without discussion last week.

It provides a management framework for the municipality to address provincial heritage properties.

The plan covers all types of heritage resources including buildings, landscapes, archaeological potential and local traditions.

The heritage master plan will be used by council and staff along with the town's official plan and strategic plan.

PRETTYING PELHAM

PELHAM — Help a lot or a litter.

Communities in Bloom is looking for helping hands to beautify the town by picking up garbage during Pelham's annual Community Participation Day.

The corporate cleanup day, for local businesses, takes place Thursday, Oct. 18; student cleanup day on Friday, Oct. 19; and the communitywide cleanup on Saturday, Oct. 20.

The community cleanup will begin at 9 a.m. at Centennial Park. Following the cleanup, a barbecue lunch will be provided by the Fenwick Lions.

Registration for all three events can be done online at www.pelham.ca.

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ECONOMY: Economic development minister says production jobs up, despite innovation resulting in staffing cuts

'Manufacturing is growing again'

ALLAN BENNER
PelhamNEWS Staff

WELLAND — Ontario's manufacturing industry is rebounding.

But the province needs to focus on two key areas to continue that momentum — innovation and exporting, said Brad Duguid, Ontario's minister of economic development and innovation.

Since the recession, Ontario has seen:

59,900
new net jobs created

122%
increase in jobs in Ontario,

46%
increase in the U.S.

The MPP for Scarborough Centre was keynote speaker at a Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce luncheon last week, at Riverstone Event Centre in Welland.

"It's time now for all Ontarians to recognize that manufacturing is growing again in Ontario," said Duguid.

"Manufacturing jobs since the global recession have gone up — not down. They've gone up by 40,000 new jobs."

Citing recent statistics, such as a 23% increase in exports and a 30% increase in sales since the recession, he said manufacturing "is not a declining sector."

"The fact is, manufacturing is coming back in Ontario. Companies are retooling. ... They're recognizing the competitive advantages of investing in innovation."

Manufacturing "is going to look a little different" in years to come, he added.

"This modernization allows the work to be done with fewer people. So while production is up closer to where it was prior to the recession, manufacturing no longer requires the same levels of staffing."

He said the provincial government has taken strides to help industries recover, and it's continuing to work towards building a stronger economy.

But the key to continue to move forward, he added, is "to commit ourselves even more to two key things that I think our growth is going to depend on."

"The first ... innovation, is going to make us more competitive," he said.

While discussing the achievements of various industrial sectors including the auto industry and the "wine industry that's phenomenal here in Niagara," Duguid said for those sectors to keep growing "they need to continue to commit to innovation."

"The second area ... that's going to drive growth in Ontario is our exports," he said.

"We're doing pretty well in this area. In fact, we're projecting to lead export growth in Canada at 9% per year in 2012 and 2013," he said. "That's a pretty optimistic projection."

Despite the rebound, the results of the recession are still evident locally.

Asked about a recent Brock University study that showed that poverty is costing $1.38 billion annually in Niagara, Duguid said poverty can be tackled by the development of a strong Ontario economy.

"Maybe more importantly than anything looking to the future, our commitment to innovation is where the global economy is going and Ontario is fast becoming a global leader in that area.

"That is where we're going to lead," he said. "And that is where we're going to help, from an economic perspective, tackle poverty."

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Industry fund considered for Niagara

ALLAN BENNER
PelhamNEWS Staff

WELLAND — By the end of the year, $20 million of provincial funding will be available to businesses in southwestern Ontario.

But it has yet to be determined if local industries will be able to tap into the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund.

Brad Duguid, Ontario's minister of economic development and innovation, was the keynote speaker at a Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce luncheon last week, organized in partnership with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 303.

Duguid told business leaders from throughout the region that the new program is based on the Eastern Ontario Development Fund, established three years ago to assist industries in that area. As a result of that government investment, Duguid said, 13,200 jobs were created in eastern Ontario communities.

Although legislation was recently approved to establish a similar fund for western Ontario industries, Duguid said the provincial government is now determining the specific area where the funds will be available — and whether or not Niagara will be part of it.

Still, he said he's been under pressure from Liberal MPPs from the Niagara area to ensure Niagara will be part of the program.

"Jim Bradley and Kim Craitor approached me early on, and they've been approaching me ever since, to suggest that Niagara region has been hit hard as well by the global recession, and they could use a boost with some of this regional economic development funding," Duguid said. "We're now in the process of considering what the boundaries are going to be and we're open to input from local leaders."

He said there's still some consultation to take place before the decision is made.

"Fairly soon, we should be in a position to finalize the boundaries for the fund and make an announcement," he said.

He said the fund, which may be allocated through a combination of grants and loans to industries, is designed to be flexible enough to appeal to industries in urban and rural areas, providing an incentive for those industries to expand.

It's also designed to leverage a $10 private-sector investment for every public dollar that's spent.

"The object is to encourage investment from outside of Ontario into those communities, and to encourage expansions from within those communities," he explained. "There are times when a business is trying to expand, and just needs a little boost to get them over the top. That's what this does, it gives them the incentive to expand while the funds are available, and create jobs."

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$20M
will be invested annually in the Western Ontario Development Fund

$53M
was invested in a similar program in eastern Ontario during the past three years

$500M
increase in the U.S.

13,200
jobs were created in eastern Ontario as a result of that fund, so far.

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comment

■ perspective

Mulroney and free trade

Brian Mulroney, whose tough decisions did not make him Canada's most beloved prime minister, was nonetheless a master at free trade.

He and then-U.S. president Ronald Reagan not only sang the same tune — When Irish Eyes Are Smiling — but they were also in sync when it came to the need for a bilateral trade agreement.

Last week, while U.S. President Barack Obama and Republican candidate Mitt Romney thrashed it out in their first televised debate, Mulroney was at Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum reflecting on Thursday's 25th anniversary of his most notable accomplishment, the signing of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement.

It was an ideological shift changer. It forced the U.S. to relinquish some of its formidable power within its entrenched trade protocol, and was a precursor to the North American Free Trade Agreement.

As Mulroney put it, he had one main goal in his trade negotiations with the U.S.: "If there was no dispute settlement process," he said, "there was no deal."

The success of the FTA cannot be denied, as evidenced by positive growth statistics the anti-free trade crowd warned would never materialize to benefit Canada.

How wrong they were.

Trouble is, time moves on and global economies change, all while free trade under Canada's often tariff-heavy thought process has remained effectively static.

It's not thinking with a 21st-century mindset, and Mulroney agrees.

"Conventional rules for trade and investment that carried us through the last half of the 20th century will not be sufficient," he said.

"What many emerging markets have in common is the extent to which the 'visible' hand of government is directing economic policy.

"The challenges are daunting," he said, "but the opportunities are enormous (and) tangible moves to more open trade and investment are still the best tonics for the global economy."

In an average minute, 24/7, more than $1 million in goods and services are exchanged between Canada and the United States.

But it is the emerging markets that must now be exploited.

Canada, for example, is no longer on the list of the top 10 global trading nations.

This, said Mulroney, must be rectified. And he is not wrong.

— Sun Media

■ COLUMN

Myth and reality in immigration system

DEAN ALLISON
FROM THE HILL

Will immigrants collect Old Age Security after only three years? The short answer is no.

For several years now, Canadians have been concerned about Bill C-428, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (residency requirement), which proposed to shorten the waiting time for immigrants applying for Old Age Security from 10 years to three. However, this bill was not passed into law, and is not under consideration.

A few facts on Parliamentary procedure are in order. When a bill is introduced to the House of Commons, it is given a C- (House of Commons) number and placed on the Order Paper, which is the agenda for that session of Parliament. When the bill's turn comes up, it is read before the House of Commons, debated, and eventually voted on by the Members of Parliament. When Parliament is dissolved as the result of an election all bills on the Order Paper die. Any bill which has not been given Royal Assent can be reintroduced in subsequent sessions of Parliament, but must go through the process again. If a dead bill is not reintroduced, it stays dead.

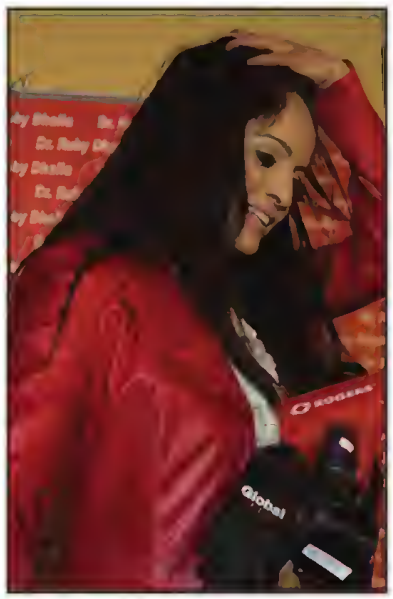
Ruby Dhalla (Liberal), of Brampton–Springdale, introduced Bill C-428 as a Private Member's Bill in June 2009 in the 40th Parliament. The bill died on the Order Paper when Parliament was dissolved for the 2011 election. It has not been reintroduced.

Since Parm Gill (Conservative) was elected for Brampton–Springdale 2011, Ruby Dhalla was no longer the Member of Parliament, and would not be sponsoring any more Private Member's Bills. Bill C-428 is dead, and shall remain so.

Each time Parliament is formed after an election, the numbers for bills restart. As of the 41st Parliament, the current Bill C-428, Indian Act Amendment and Replacement Act, is totally different from C-428 in the 40th Parliament.

Unfortunately, e-mails still circulate advising voters to contact their MPs to vote against this dead bill. These e-mails are out of date, and do nothing more than upset people over a non-issue.

If you hear rumours about proposed legislation, would like more information about the legislative process, or want to check the status of a bill in which you are interested, please visit Parliament's LegisInfo website: http://www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/



JACK BOLAND QMI Agency Niagara
Ruby Dhalla (Liberal) introduced Bill C-428 as a Private Member's Bill in June 2009

ANDRE FORGET QMI Agency
Parm Gill during a break at Parliament Hill.

Our Conservative government is committed to a sustainable Old Age Security program, and believes that the current 10 year residence requirement strikes the proper balance between making a reasonable contribution to Canada and the expectation of receiving a pension.

We have taken steps to reform the OAS program to keep it sustainable in light of Canada's changing demographics. There are currently over 4.7 million Canadians over the age of 65, and estimates put that number around 9.3 million by 2030. Since OAS is funded from general revenue, and not premiums on pay cheques like Canada Pension Plan, increasing expenses for OAS require increases in taxes or cuts in other spending. It does not make sense to exacerbate the demographic change by lowering the residency requirement for immigrants.

Our government is proud of the measures we have taken to treat seniors fairly in recognition of their contributions to Canadian society over the course of their lives, and will continue to reassess and adjust programs like CPP and OAS as necessary.

Dean Allison is the Mempber of Parliament for the riding of Niagara West-Glanbrook

■ TRAGEDY

Hunter fatally shoots self

KARENA WALTER
QMI Agency Niagara

PELHAM — The Fenwick father of a young man who accidentally shot himself to death in a hunting accident said he's heen overwhelmed by the support of his son's friends.

"The comments I'm getting the last three days here have just been overwhelming, from people who had only known Andrew for two or three years," said Jerry Winnicki, speaking from Ottawa on Tuesday, Oct. 2.

"It makes me proud to know that he's my son."

Andrew Winnicki, who moved from Pelham to Ottawa about three years ago, was killed on the evening of Sunday, Sept. 30 in Osgoode, Ont. Well known in hockey and golf circles in Pelham, he was going to he celebrating his 23rd birthday this month.

His father said Andrew was duck hunting with his uncle and 15-year-old cousin in the rain — perfect duck hunting conditions — when he somehow slipped when he was ready to shoot and the gun went off.

He said it was Andrew's idea to go hunting and called his uncle to come with him.

"That was his glory," his father said of Andrew's love of hunting. "The uncle is really taking it hard."

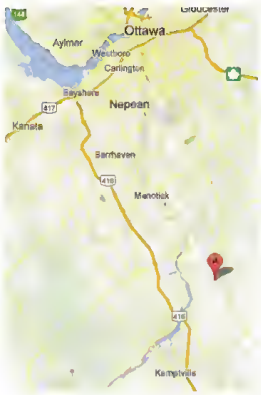
Emergency crews responded at about 7 p.m. Sunday and Winnicki was rushed to hospital. Police were at the scene, which overlooks a pond, until about 4:30 a.m. Monday, Oct. 1.

Winnicki graduated from E.L. Crossley Secondary School in Fonthill and moved to Ottawa to go to university.

After a year, he decided to switch focus and eventually went into the elevator mechanic trade with his brother, whom he lived with. He worked for Otis Elevators.

Growing up, Winnicki got the nickname Diesel when he was four or five because of his broad shoulders and solid stature. But he grew into a slender athlete.

He was team captain of the provincial champion Pelham Panthers when they won the bantam A/E final in 2004. It was Pelham's first Ontario Minor Hockey Association championship in 25 years.



GOOGLE MAPS
Dalmeny Rd. and 2nd Line Rd., the private property south of Ottawa where Andrew Winnicki was accidentally shot while hunting.

The head coach at the time, Mike Martelli, recalled Winnicki being a "natural leader" who other kids and coaching staff looked up to.

"He was just a pleasure to be around. He brought a lot of energy to the team, energy to the parents," Martelli said.

During the championship streak, Martelli said, the team travelled on buses every weekend for six weeks and Winnicki would be the one who always livened up the long rides to places like Belleville.

"He'd get everyone wound up on the bus, laughing even after a loss," he said. "That was just the kind of guy he was."

John White, of Beechwood Golf and Country Club, also remembered Winnicki as a nice kid.

"He was a very talented young player," he said.

Winnicki was in his second year of an apprenticeship to become an elevator constructor.

"He's going to be sorely missed," said Dan Vinette, business manager with the International Union of Elevator Constructors Local 96 in Ottawa. "He was a good kid. He was in my class."

Vinette said the union had received several condolence calls as the news made the rounds on Oct. 1.

Other friends turned to social media to lament the "absolutely tragic loss" of the young man, beloved for always having a good time.

Ottawa police said they are still investigating and will not elaborate on any possible circumstances surrounding the shooting.

Major crime investigators have not been assigned to the case — which would normally occur if police suspected foul play.

Winnicki's father Jerry said his son's friends in Ottawa are sbocked and some have taken the week off work. They've told him Andrew made a big impression on them and their children, with some struggling about what they'll tell their kids. "He didn't have an enemy. He was the type of guy who would walk into a room and leave and everybody would remember him for his presence and good nature," he said. "He was just unbelievable."

Winnicki leaves behind his mother, Anne, two older brothers, Robert and Matthew, and a younger sister, Leanna.

— with files from Danielle Bell, Ottawa Sun

karena.walter@sunmedia.ca

Andrew Winnicki

FACEBOOK PHOTO

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■ **PLANNING:** Pelham site alteration bylaw

Pelham site alteration bylaw draft still up in the air

MARYANNE FIRTH
PelhamNEWS Staff

PELHAM — How deep does council want to dig into site alterations?

That was the question up for debate last week as the town's controversial site alteration bylaw again became the topic of discussion.

The bylaw is currently in draft form and will be presented to council in a staff report on Nov. 5.

If approved, it could apply to changes to properties, particularly in rural areas, that would affect neighbours, water flow, grading, soil quality or safety.

The lack of such a bylaw became an issue after no action could be taken despite concerns about berms made of unusual materials being created within the town.

Planning director Craig Larmour said Pelham has received about 20 comments regarding the draft bylaw, with the majority opposed to its creation.

Concerns have been raised that council will be impeding on the rights of property owners, he said.

Rather than continue moving forward with the bylaw, Ward 1 Coun. Richard Rybiak suggested that staff instead go back to the drawing board and create a bylaw to control the import of fill instead.

"We need to come to a quick resolution," he said of the fill issues. If a fill bylaw comes forward, council could then decide whether it's necessary to move forward with an all-encompassing site alteration bylaw, he said.

Rybiak

"There are issues beyond the berms," said Ward 2 Coun. Gary Accursi.

Staff, he said, need to be given time review all necessary information and seek legal comment before a comprehensive report can be brought forward to council.

It's only with all the details that council can make an informed decision, he added.

Rybiak's motion was defeated.

The draft bylaw is available on the town's website at www.pelham.ca.

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CHARITY: Leadership Giving Challenge underway

Three Amigos matching United Way donations

WAYNE CAMPBELL
PelhamNEWS Staff

PELHAM — Frank Adamson and Dolores Bujold Wright doubled their United Way of South Niagara contributions by accepting the Leadership Giving Challenge.

Each donated $1,000, money matched by the Three Amigos — Peter Papp, Rick Lowes and Terry Duff.

Mel and Rick Groom of Pelham are co-chairs of the challenge, which has proved successful in other United Way campaigns including St. Catharines.

Adamson, who owns KwikFit in Fonthill, is a former United Way campaign chair and one-time executive director in Cambridge.

Bujold Wright, owner of Bujold Colborn and president of the Welland Downtown BIA, said many of her employee benefits clients use programs supported by the United Way.

The Three Amigos match is for individual rather than corporate donations. Every new leadership gift of $1,000 or more will be matched up to $15,000.

With a decline in local manufacturing and other jobs, the United Way has had to shift fundraising strategies beyond payroll deductions, Papp said.

United Way of South Niagara's 2012 campaign goal is $600,000.

wayne.campbell@sunmedia.ca

■ NIAGARA REGION

Councillors reconsider integrity commissioner

JEFF BOLICHOWSKI
QMI Agency

THOROLD — Regional council will be giving a watchdog a second look.

Councillors voted 21-6 Thursday to seek a report on possibly hiring an integrity commissioner. But although councillors overwhelmingly backed the move, many said they'd read the report but weren't sure on whether the job was needed.

"We've talked about it," said Port Colborne Coun. David Barrick. He said council already ruled out a commissioner over the summer when they sent staff to draft a new code of conduct.

That 36-page code has been sitting in a filing cabinet since June, when council deferred it for a third time.

"There's more than one way to skin a cat, as we all know. It's why this motion is before us," Barrick said.

The request was brought forward by Niagara Falls Coun. Selina Volpatti.

She said a commissioner doesn't have to be a full-time staffer. She said it could be an office the Region shares with the lower-tier municipalities.

"None of us want to incur additional costs around this table," she said. She said the commissioner could be hired on retainer.

"The intention is to make our region more transparent and accountable than it already is," she said.

By law, only an integrity commissioner can levy concrete punishments on councillors who behave badly, including docking their pay.

But council has other discipline tools at its disposal, said St. Catharines Coun. Brian Heit.

Heit said the law gives Regional Chair Gary Burroughs — who voiced support for the commissioner concept — leeway to kick bullies out of the room.

"There are rules and regulations now that can deal with issues if we think someone isn't acting inappropriately," he said.

"To hide behind a commissioner who can't deal with issues until after something's happened is inappropriate."

Heit said a code of conduct could solve the problem. But he said a commissioner wouldn't be able to nip problems in the bud because the role comes in after the fact.

Niagara Falls Coun. Bart Maves was unhappy with the motion, too. He said council's planning committee already settled the issue during the code of conduct debate.

"We've had lengthy debates. We had options A, B, C and D put forward," he said.

"We really should respect the work that that committee did."

And he said the Region already has a code of conduct.

"One page, with no consequences," Burroughs replied.

Welland Mayor Barry Sharpe said his city has asked for reports on the commissioner issue. He said private companies providing that service would reach out to the Region.

And West Lincoln Mayor Doug Joyner said his town uses a London solicitor as an integrity commissioner.

■ CULTURE

Historic Halloween cemetery walk

PELHAM — Local lore will come to life during a Walk Through History at Fonthill Cemetery.

Guests are invited to take a guided walk through one of the town's oldest cemeteries on Halloween night, Oct. 31.

The walk is being held as part of Niagara Region's Cultural Capital of Canada campaign for 2012.

The tales of Pelham's past will be told during two guided tours — at 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. Guides will dress in period costume and lead tours by lantern.

Participants will visit grave sites of important local luminaries. Some have achieved wealth and fame, while others remain unknown to most today.

The tour, which runs rain or shine, is suitable for people of all ages. Guests are asked to use the cemetery's Highland Ave. entrance.

Admission is free but preregistration is required and can be done by visiting town hall, 20 Pelham Town Square, calling 905-892-2607 ext. 321 or e-mailing tdruzina@pelham.ca.

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Fonthill cemetery MARYANNE FIRTH Staff Photo

■ SAFETY

Fire Prevention Week in Pelham

PELHAM — There will be an alarming number of activities happening in Pelham next week.

Fire Prevention Week kicked off Tuesday, with an open house at Station No. 2.

Station No. 3, 597 Sixteen Rd., held an open house featuring the Shorthills Firefighters' famous chili, as well as fire extinguisher inspections and demonstrations.

On Thursday, Oct. 11, firefighters will be at Pelham Public Library at 1 p.m. with activities for youngsters.

On Friday, Oct. 12, Pelham Fire Department and Pelham library will come together once again for fire safety activities beginning at 6 p.m. There will be fire extinguisher training, a demonstration by the town's extrication team and a scavenger hunt.

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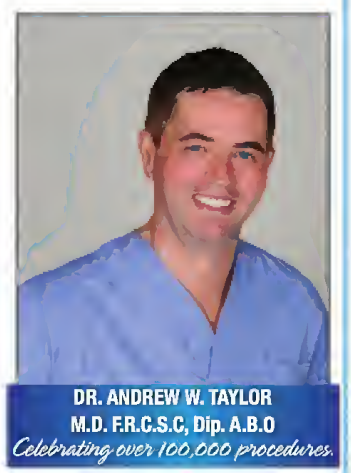

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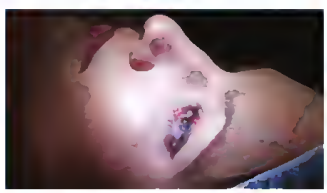

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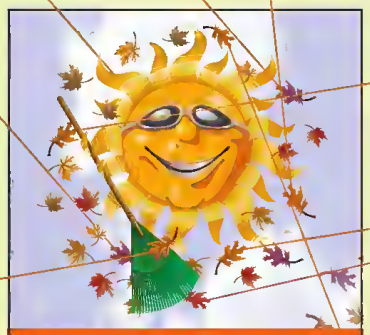

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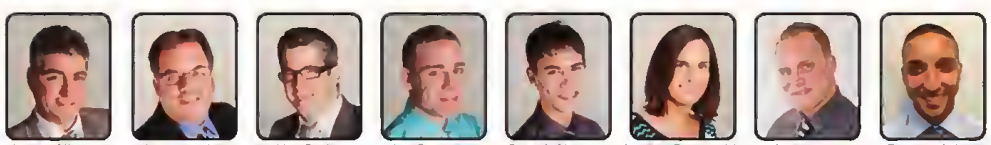

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■ REGION

Councillors cool to attendance pay idea

JEFF BOLICHOWSKI
QMI Agency

THOROLD — The prospect of taking a pay cut for playing hooky saw regional councillors dump the idea in the filing cabinet last week.

On Thursday, Oct. 4, councillors were faced with a report from a citizens' commission binding about one-quarter of their pay to their attendance record. But they agreed to receive the motion, dropping it in their inbox with little debate and no orders for staff to act.

It's unclear when the report could come forward again.

The proposals, put forward by a group of four citizens, would have seen $7,000 of councillors' $27,527 salary awarded based on how many meetings they showed up at. And it would have frozen their pay until the economy perks up, then tied it to increases in the consumer price index.

"The electorate is your boss," said Kim Shennan, a member of the committee.

"The only way you can be seen to be accountable to that boss is to attend council meetings."

Committee member Douglas Mathews said the only performance metric the group could find for council was attendance. He said that's because council has no actual job description, so it's hard to measure how well they're doing their jobs.

The committee figured the average councillor does about 10 to 12 hours of work per week.

But Pelham Coun. Brian Baty chafed at those numbers. Under Baty's questioning, the committee revealed that estimate was based on just three written surveys and two verbal responses out of 30 part-time councillors.

"I'll remind you of the formula of garbage in, garbage out," he said.

"I believe many councillors believe that 10 to 12 hours per week is a low estimate."

Pelham Coun. Brian Baty, in response to the citizens' committee estimate that the average councillor does about 10 to 12 hours of work per week.

He apologized for the comments later Thursday night, after Shennan and Mathews had left.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Lord Mayor Dave Eke, speaking after the meeting, said he didn't think the committee did its homework by going with so few samples. And he said it's up to councillors if they want to bring back the report.

"I think there was some valid questions that were asked by councillors as to whether the sampling that was done was valid," he said.

He said the committee could have used a bit more guidance.

"I'm not condemning anybody," he said. "I just feel there needed to be a little bit more due diligence."

Baty figured Niagara's representatives engage their constituents more than most. "I believe many councillors believe that 10 to 12 hours per week is a low estimate," he said.

St. Catharines Coun. Andy Petrowski chafed at the 2% cap on future wage increases. He said inflation has been fairly steady in past years, but if it picks up again, it could outpace the cap and leave council's wages in the dust.

"A 2% cap is hardly fair in keeping up with the cost of living," he said.

In the end, the report was filed after Eke moved to receive it and nothing more. Councillors didn't debate the motion and quickly moved on with their meeting.

"A 2% cap is hardly fair in keeping up with the cost of living."

St. Catharines Coun. Andy Petrowski on future wage increase caps

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■ COMMUNITY

Cuvee nixes Ontario 'wine Oscars' for new format

DON FRASER
QMI Agency

ST. CATHARINES — A marquee regional fundraiser known informally as Ontario's wine Oscars is being rejigged for its 25th year.

At the 2013 Cuvee Gala at Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort, the wines poured March 1 will no longer be judged by a panel of winemakers in an awards process.

Instead, participating winemakers will pour a single VQA wine chosen by themselves as a personal favourite.

Organizers feel the changes will broaden the wine tasting experience for attendees as the event will now includes wineries that previously might not have taken part.

Cuvee Weekend is an annual money-maker for the Niagara Community Foundation, which was established in 2000 and has raised close to $20 million.

The foundation has granted more than $4 million from its endowment fund to support local charities in a wide variety of areas.

"We're getting back to the roots of Cuvee, which is all about celebrating excellence," said Liz Palmieri, executive director of the Niagara Community Foundation.

"At last year's Cuvee, we had more than 260 wines and we really felt we needed to get back to the roots by narrowing down.

"It's still celebrating the wineries and winemakers, who'll be able to select the wine they want to pour. The wines at the Cuvee will also be grouped by varietal ... it's much more focused tasting and focused event."

Celebrated chefs and food purveyors will again provide samples at live cooking stations.

The Cuvee en Route passport program during the Cuvee Weekend Wine Experience also remains unchanged. From March 1 to 3, weekend guests can tour and taste the offerings of various wineries along Niagara's Wine Route.

About 700 guests are expected for the revamped Niagara Falls gala that will include icewine and sparkling wine bars and an enhanced Apres Cuvee party.

Organizers hope to raise at least $50,000 this year.

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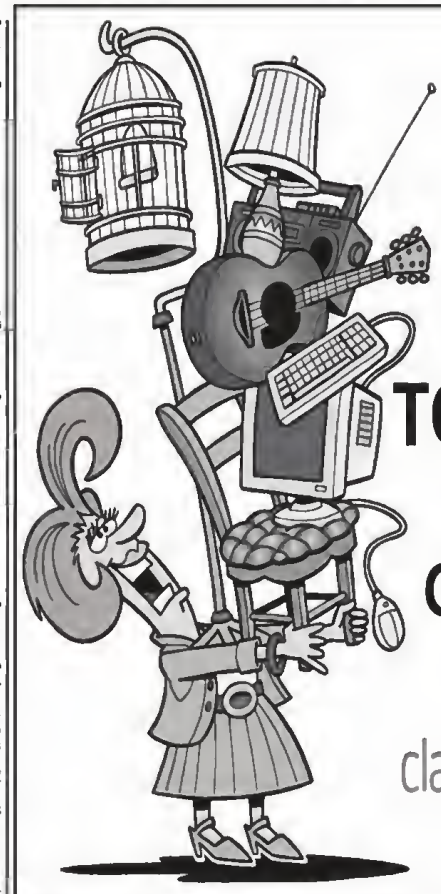

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SOCIAL SERVICES: Region shortfall 52%, not 88% as first thought

Cut to homelessness funding softened

JEFF BOLICHOWSKI
QMI Agency

THOROLD — Niagara Region's homelessness woes have gone from worse to bad as the province fixes its math.

The region's social services department was struggling with an expected 88% cut in funding for homelessness-related programs, triggered by the slashing of the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit.

But last week Niagara community services commissioner Katherine Chislett said the province made a mistake calculating the funds, meaning Niagara will only lose 52% of its funding.

That's a cut of $2.6 million, instead of $4.2 million as originally feared.

"It's like instead of being really, drastically, horribly bad, now it's just really bad," she said.

Chislett said a letter the province sent to the Region explained the original figures as an "initial draft allocation," but said some of the numbers were derived from data "inaccuracies."

She said the new figures were what the Region was originally expecting — bad news still, but not the catastrophe they were before.

"It's still bad, because terminating the Community Start-Up program is not a good thing," she said.

The news came on the heels of Welland MPP Cindy Forster criticizing the governing Liberals at Queen's Park Tuesday for chopping the fund.

The start-up fund is typically drawn on by people in need who require assistance to cover last month's rent or emergency expenses like pest control, funerals or moving. It's good for about $799 per month.

As of January, though, it will be eliminated in favour of a new funding structure.

Ontario Environment Minister and St. Catharines MPP Jim Bradley said in an e-mail that while the 2012 budget does drop the start-up fund, the new consolidated funding pot that replaces it gives the Region more control.

"This change will give municipalities more flexibility to address their unique local needs," he said.

And, he said, the province has taken a large chunk of the Region's social service spending onto its own shoulders, to the tune of $54 million in 2012.

Forster, an NDP member, said Wednesday the new model spreads half the funding out among more people. She said extending the funding to the working poor leaves less in the pot for Niagara's neediest.

"It is going to severely handicap and negatively impact the most vulnerable in the Niagara region," she said.

Forster said it costs less to hand out the benefit once every few years than to keep people in homeless shelters or the hospital. She said the province needs to take a closer look at the homelessness problem.

"I don't think that looking after homelessness and housing is something the municipal ratepayer should have to take on. It's a provincial issue," she said.

Rob Cammaert, a longtime community service worker at Community Care St. Catharines and Thorold, said he can see the funding change leaving more vulnerable people turning to homeless shelters.

"It's really piling upon people that don't have a good situation to begin with," he said. "If there are no places for people to go, I don't know what's going to happen."

And YWCA Niagara executive director Elisabeth Zimmermann said the loss of the fund will make it harder for people to leave shelters. That in turn makes it harder for new people to get in, she said.

jeff.bolichowski@sunmedia.ca
Twitter: @JeffB_Standard

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The fund is set to be slashed starting in January after getting the axe in the 2012 Ontario budget.

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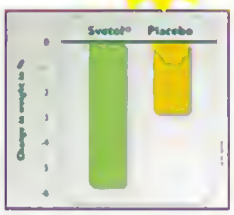

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